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ABSTRACT

This paper, which focuses on community colleges and job placement, is part of a series published by the Center for Community College Policy, designed to support state and local policymakers, as well as educational leaders who are interested in policy issues related to the two-year postsecondary sector. The current emphasis on "work-first," getting welfare recipients into any jobs, no matter the pay, is counterintuitive. Jobs that pay as much as is needed for a single woman to raise two children often require more than a high school degree, and promotion from an entry-level position into a career often requires formal postsecondary training. Since community colleges play a significant role in workforce development, collaboration with state development agencies and local workforce development can ensure that programs are developed to meet the needs of key employers, who will then hire students. Several policy options are described in this document, such as: (1) encouraging colleges on their own accord to make necessary connections between technical programs and employment; (2) consolidating funding for job training for the poor; and (3) providing incentives to serve the poor in mainstream technical education programs. (AF)

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COMMUNITY COLLEGES: CONNECTING THE POOR TO GOOD JOBS

by Davis Jenkins and Joan Fitzgerald

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INTRODUCTION

A 1995 study by the Women and Poverty Project in Washington, D.C., estimated that a single parent living with two school-age children in Sacramento, California, would need to earn the equivalent of $14.52 an hour (including health benefits) to be "self-sufficient" in the sense of being free of financial assistance from public or other sources. With few exceptions, jobs that pay such wages require at least some training beyond high school. This is true even at the entry level. Building a good entry-level job into a career requires continual learning, both on the job and through formal postsecondary technical training.

Initial and continuing training beyond high school must therefore be integral parts of efforts to connect poor youth and adults with good jobs. This is true for school-to-work programs that seek to serve economically disadvantaged youth. It is also true for the "welfare-to-work" programs now being put in place by the federal government and the states, which have as their ultimate goal not just employment but "economic self-sufficiency."

The reality is that most poor youth and welfare recipients do not qualify for jobs that would allow them and their families to become self-sufficient. A recent study by the Illinois Job Gap Project of job openings in the state at different skill levels found that there are 3,137 job seekers for every job requiring no training. The solution is not to create more low-skill jobs, but to invest in education and training that will serve as a bridge for the poor to well-paying skilled jobs.

This point has been lost in the current emphasis on "work first" — getting public-aid recipients off the welfare rolls and into any job, no matter what the pay. Most work-first programs fail to provide training as a follow-up to initial employment that would enable welfare recipients now in the workforce to move from low-wage jobs to living-wage jobs. Such programs are likely to become little more than a revolving door between unemployment and low-wage, dead-end work. The needs of employers also will not be served, since the most critical labor shortages throughout the country are generally in more skilled occupations.

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Community colleges are well-positioned to provide the training necessary to connect poor youth and adults to well-paying jobs with a future. This paper examines ways state and local policymakers can help community colleges realize their potential to play this pivotal role.

San Diego Community College District's VESL Program

The San Diego Community College District (SDCCD) has been a pioneer in the development of curricula for Vocational English-as-a-Second-Language (VESL). Once ESL students attain basic proficiency in English, they typically want to find employment, but are usually only qualified for low-skill, low-wage jobs. The VESL program encourages students to pursue vocational training that leads to better paying jobs. VESL provides intermediate-level English literacy students with English instruction combined with basic vocational training. This approach shortens the path to gainful employment by integrating basic-skills instruction with vocational training. The VESL program has raised reading scores from the 4th–to 8th–grade level in 10 months, and has placed 90% of completers in more advanced vocational training.

II Background

The potential of community colleges to connect the poor to good jobs stems from their growing role in two areas: first, in providing the initial and continuing technical training that has become critical for career-path employment, and second, in serving the learning needs of large numbers of educationally and economically disadvantaged adults.

Community colleges' role in training for career-path employment. Effective community college technical programs actively involve local industry, working with business partners to design curricula, train full-time faculty and recruit adjunct instructors with industry experience, loan equipment, provide internships for students and test and identify job placements for graduates. These programs seek to work with employers offering well-paying, career-path jobs to their students. They develop long-term relationships with such employers, providing not only initial training for the preparation of new hires, but also continuing training to support the skill-upgrading and career advancement of incumbent employees. This continuing training is ideally customized to meet the needs of both employers and employees.

As postsecondary technical training has become the gateway to well-paying, career-path jobs in many fields, community college technical programs have become integral parts of school-to-work initiatives. In the best cases, community college faculty and high school teachers team up with industry advisors to revamp the high school curriculum so that it provides the necessary foundation for initial postsecondary technical education. In some cases, community colleges offer dual credit courses for high school students.

High-quality tech-prep and dual-enrollment programs are rare in school systems that serve poor and minority youth, however. Many inner-city high schools are too overwhelmed with day-to-day problems to implement new programs that require considerable investment of teacher time in curriculum development and partnering with colleges and employers. Community colleges need to take the lead on school-to-work by providing bridges to poor schools that link economically and educationally disadvantaged students to college-level technical education programs.

Davis Jenkins is a faculty fellow at the Great Cities Institute at the University of Illinois in Chicago. Joan Fitzgerald is an associate professor in the College of Urban Planning and a faculty fellow at the Great Cities Institute.

Community colleges' role in serving educationally/economically disadvantaged adults. Community colleges also play an important role as institutions of second chance for adults lacking basic skills. These noncredit programs include: Adult Basic Education (ABE) and GED (General Equivalence Diploma) for adults seeking instruction in basic literacy or high school equivalency, English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) programs for immigrants, and basic vocational training for displaced workers and other unemployed adults seeking entry-level employment in technical fields. One reason for the high enrollment in these programs is the availability of federal funding, which is usually passed through states and localities.

The problem is that too few adult literacy students advance to programs that lead to decent-paying jobs. The intent of community college ABE, ESL and GED programs has been to enable adult students to become more literate (usually measured in grade-level terms) and earn a high school equivalency degree. A growing number of forward-looking community colleges are linking adult literacy programs to vocational training. Instead of ABE and ESL, these colleges offer Vocational Adult Basic Education (VABE) and Vocational English-as-Second-Language (VESL) in which students are taught literacy skills in the context of basic vocational training.

Some colleges offer "adult tech-prep bridge" programs, which are designed to prepare educationally disadvantaged adults for postsecondary technical education and entry-level employment as technicians. These programs often do not require a high school diploma or GED on the principle that once students have secured well-paying jobs and can qualify for college-level work, they will be prepared and motivated to complete the GED.

Florida's Performance-Based Training System

Florida began offering performance incentives to community colleges in 1995 with the Performance-based Incentive Funding Program (PBIF), which was quickly followed by a second program called the Performance-Based Budgeting Program (PB^2). The PBIF enables community colleges to "earn" additional funds for preparing and placing students in targeted occupations. PB^2 is based more on the number and type of students a community college graduates.

The logic behind these programs was that a small incentive (less than 2% of additional appropriations) would move community colleges to be more responsive to student outcomes. Initial evaluations of PBIF and PB^2, though promising, have been inconclusive, since the programs are still too new. Nevertheless, in 1997, Florida legislators approved legislation tying funding for workforce development programs, in part, to performance: 15% for completions and 85% for enrollment. Additionally, colleges can earn bonus incentive funds based on job placements. The legislation greatly affects Florida's community colleges, since they provide the lion's share of workforce development services in the state. This funding scheme is so controversial that implementation has been delayed until a legislature-appointed committee can make implementation recommendations.

The key: creating connections. Creating connections is the hallmark of community colleges that are effective in serving as a pathway for the poor to gainful employment. These colleges connect high school and adult literacy programs, on the one hand, and occupational/technical programs and employment, on the other. They seek to connect learning in the classroom and the learning demands of the workplace by using "contextual learning." Students learn academic skills by working on problems in teams in a way that mirrors the culture of the best workplaces.

Colleges that are effective in advancing the employment prospects of the poor also provide intensive case management and personal and career counseling. In addition, they form partnerships with social

service agencies to offer disadvantaged students assistance with housing, child care, drug, health care and other services that colleges are not well-equipped to provide. In urban areas especially, community colleges partner with community-based organizations, which help to recruit community residents for training programs, provide case management to students and, in the best cases, follow up with program graduates once they are employed to ensure that they stay on track and pursue further education to advance their careers.

CHICAGO ADULT TECH-PREP BRIDGE

Richard J. Daley College, one of Chicago's city colleges, and three community-based organizations have partnered to recruit adults from high-poverty areas and train them for entry-level skilled manufacturing jobs and postsecondary technical education. The community organizations recruit local residents for the program, serve as sites for instruction and provide case management and placement assistance to program participants. The 16-week Tech-Prep Bridge program offers intensive instruction in workplace mathematics, applied physics and industrial computer applications. Students learn the fundamentals of blueprint reading, metrology (measurement) and machining through hands-on instruction in the college's manufacturing technology laboratory. Emphasis is placed on employment skills through a World of Manufacturing course. Of the 45 graduates from the first two cycles of the program, all are currently employed, 36 have entry-level manufacturing jobs that include benefits, and 14 are enrolled in Daley's associate degree program in Manufacturing Technology.

Unfortunately, these connections are often not made. As a result, too few high school graduates are prepared for the postsecondary technical education that is required for most good jobs. Too many community colleges have become two-tiered institutions, with large noncredit adult literacy and vocational programs enrolling the majority of economically and educationally disadvantaged students who enter community colleges, and offering little opportunity to move into college-credit programs that lead to good jobs.

The challenge. The challenge for policymakers is how to provide incentives to community colleges to make the connections necessary to address the employment needs of the poor. Another challenge is how to encourage community colleges to take greater responsibility for the employment outcomes of *all* of their students, including the disadvantaged, when community college funding is generally based on enrollment, with little accountability for the outcomes achieved.

POLICY OPTIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

There are at least three strategies that state policymakers can use to encourage community colleges to serve as an educational pathway to good jobs.

1. Encourage colleges on their own accord to make the necessary connections between technical programs and employment, between learning in the classroom and learning at work, and between postsecondary technical programs and high school and adult literacy programs. These connections can be made within the existing structure of programs and funding.

For example, Illinois and other states are encouraging adult literacy programs to focus more on employment outcomes for their students rather than just on grade-level achievement. This will prompt colleges in these states to integrate literacy instruction with vocational skills training, as in the VABE and VESL programs described earlier. State funds could be used to support demonstration projects that show the benefits of programs that improve access to college for economically and educationally disadvantaged students. The weakness of this strategy is that it fails to

provide real incentives for community colleges to change in systemic ways.

2. Consolidate funding for job training for the poor. This approach is being promoted by the federal government and implemented by most states in the "One-Stop Career Centers," or "One-Stops." The One-Stops combine under one administrative umbrella — and often under one roof — all of the agencies that provide support services needed to help the poor find jobs: public aid, unemployment insurance, employment service and job training. Money for job training is disbursed through "training vouchers" that allow the client to choose among training providers.

Participating in One-Stops encourages community colleges to cooperate with other publicly funded agencies and, in theory at least, to compete with other training providers for training vouchers. But the limited amount of funding for vouchers, and the work requirements and time constraints placed on welfare recipients, denies One-Stop clients a connection to the postsecondary technical training that in turn leads to jobs with a future.

3. Provide incentives to serve the poor in mainstream technical education programs. Several states have been experimenting with various approaches to performance-based funding. Florida's Performance-Based Training System is a particularly promising example of this strategy. Florida ties funding of all postsecondary technical education to the employment outcomes these programs achieve. Special incentives are given to programs that lead to employment for "targeted" or disadvantaged populations, including welfare recipients, displaced workers and the disabled.

Holding community colleges accountable for employment outcomes will encourage them to establish tech-prep connections with high schools and adult tech-prep bridge programs. This ensures that entering students are prepared to handle programs designed to meet industry standards. A possible weakness of this strategy is that it requires an extensive information and reporting system to track and document student employment outcomes.

Cooperative Education at LaGuardia Community College

A successful pedagogical innovation at LaGuardia Community College in New York City is the learning community, thematically organized clusters of two to four courses. Examples of clusters include: Introductory Business, which links Introduction to Business, Composition I and Introductory Economics; and Technology and the World Today, which links Composition I, Introductory Sociology and Computers and Society. As a result of seeing connections among classes and disciplines, students report being able to understand course content more fully. LaGuardia's students also are required to complete two terms of internship. These work-based learning experiences enhance student understanding of course material and result in 65% of students being hired by the company with which they intern. Faculty view the clusters and internships as a key reason for LaGuardia's high retention and graduation rates.

Policy Questions

1. Who are likely to be champions of the status quo? While consolidating funding programs sounds good in theory, it is difficult to pull off politically and practically. Those who benefit from categorically funded programs will likely oppose change. For example, federal- and state-supported adult literacy programs have employed legions of adult literacy program administrators and instructors at community colleges (as well as other organizations) who see their role as improving literacy levels rather than as preparing for employment. Whatever the merits of consolidation at the level of policy,

the challenge of consolidation and coordination at the program level will be daunting.

North Carolina: Connecting Education and Training to Economic Development

In North Carolina, community colleges are a centerpiece of the state's economic development strategy. State-subsidized job training has been a key reason for the state's low unemployment rate and dramatic increases in per-capita income throughout the 1990s. Technical college education and training programs have been developed to respond to the needs of the key industries in eight industrial centers. These colleges offer three types of services to industry: on-site customized training to firms; initial technical training or apprenticeship for youth and young adults; and technical assistance in incorporating new technologies. Community colleges also play an important role in serving the "transitional learner" who is a victim of industrial restructuring and needs to retrain for a more viable occupation.

2. Can policy alone create the changes needed? A key ingredient of successful efforts by community colleges to serve the poor is leadership. Good leaders create a vision and a clear mission with which faculty, staff and students can identify. Then good leaders find ways to motivate faculty and create a sense of ownership and pride among those implementing the changes. Further, good leaders do not just direct internal change, but change the connections between the college and the broader community. They are active in the community, establishing partnerships and linkages and aggressively pursuing new opportunities.

V

Policy Linkages

As suggested above, policy linkages are critical to creating the intra- and inter-institutional connections that create a coherent educational path by which the poor can advance to well-paying jobs with a future. The potential role of community colleges in school-to-work and welfare-to-work are described above. Other possibilities are discussed here:

- **State and local economic development programs.** One set of potentially fruitful policy linkages is to state economic development programs. Many states are pursuing economic development strategies in which community colleges play a central role in providing education and job training in targeted industries. In urban areas especially, public programs such as empowerment zones, enterprise communities, tax-increment financing districts and other targeted economic development programs are also germane. Programs such as these often provide funding for meeting the workforce needs of local industry as well as finding employment for residents of economically distressed communities.
- **Workforce development boards.** Many states have established "statewide workforce development boards" or "human resource investment councils" to oversee education and training for employment and to encourage state agencies and institutions to cooperate in meeting the workforce needs of employers and job-seekers. These bodies, which tend to include strong representation from the private sector as well as education and government, may be well-positioned to promote the policy linkages that are critical to realizing

the potential role of community colleges in connecting the poor to gainful employment.

- **Learning networks.** Establishing linkages and partnerships is new to many community colleges. To be effective, they need to participate in "learning networks" to gain knowledge of how to adapt best-practice ideas to their own institutions and environments. Learning networks can be organized at several levels. RC 2000 (Renewal and Change), for example, is a national network of urban community colleges organized to promote innovation in programs to meet the specific needs of inner-city populations. At the regional level, the Consortium for Manufacturing Competitiveness, a consortium of community colleges in the 13 southeastern states, was organized to enhance the capacity of its members to provide business outreach programs. At the local level, the MacArthur Foundation is supporting the Workforce Development Partnership among employment and training providers in Chicago that have been effective in enabling poor residents to secure good jobs for which there is strong demand. The City Colleges of Chicago will be an important partner in this learning network.

Conclusion

Clearly, community colleges must be viewed as integral actors in broader workforce development networks. This means working with state economic development programs and local workforce development boards and city planning departments to ensure that education and training programs are meeting the needs of key employers. It means holding community colleges and other providers more accountable for the employment outcomes of all of their students, but especially the disadvantaged. Existing state and local programs can be revised and new demonstration programs developed to create these linkages.

Integrating the poor into mainstream education for employment requires more than legislation. There has to be a common vision that this is an important goal, starting with state government and extending down to the level of the community college faculty. There are many examples of community college programs that serve the poor well. These innovative programs were not singular events accomplished in response to legislative mandates, but were developed through a process of experimentation in curriculum and relationship building by committed staff.

VII. Resources

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VIII. Contacts

For more information on: San Diego Community College District's VESL programs, contact Catherine Clarke Stoll, assistant chancellor for instructional services, 619-584-6965, or Barbara Barnes, associate dean, Mid-City Continuing Education Center, 619-265-3455.

Chicago Adult Tech-Prep Bridge Program, contact Shirley Knazze, dean of career and economic development, Richard J. Daley College, 773-838-0300, or Maria Ayala, executive director, Instituto del Progreso Latino, 773-890-0055.

Cooperative Education at LaGuardia Community College, contact: Catherine Farrell, associate dean of cooperative education, 718-482-5200.

Florida Performance-Based Training System, contact Pat Dallet of the Florida Postsecondary Education Planning Commission, 904-488-7894, or Steve Campora of Enterprise Florida, 904-921-1119.

North Carolina's community colleges in economic development, contact Bill Tanner at the North Carolina Department of Commerce, 919-733-4962.

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